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TWO NOTES ON *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT*

Two passages in this splendid Middle English poem have caused difficulty and various comments. The first is line 160:

And scholes under schankes þere þe schalk rides.

Here the trouble centers about *scholes*, which Morris in his glossary explained as "hands down(?), or perhaps an error for shoes." Skeat (*Trans. of Phil. Soc.*, 1903-6, p. 366) regarded it as meaning 'thin plates,' comparing Swed. *skolla*. He thought *scholes* in this place "the side-flaps of a saddle (to prevent the leg-armor from galling the horse)." Cyril Brett (*Mod. Lang. Rev.*, x, 189) rightly pointed out, as opposed to Skeat's note, that the word occurs in the description of the knight's dress, not the horse's accouterments. He suggested "leather or other protection under or inside the thighs," as in modern riding breeches. P. G. Thomas (*Eng. Stud.*, XLVII, 311) tried to connect the word with OF. *cholet*, explained by Godefroy as *soulet* 'little sole.' This would make the word equivalent to *choletz*,¹ with *ch* for *sch*. Such a *ch* for *sch* does occur rarely in the poem, as *cheldez* for *scheldez* 'shields' in line 1611, though not there alliterating, and in *worship* 'worship' in 1976. Thomas's explanation of the phonology is not convincing, however, especially if some simpler interpretation is possible. The word is not in the *NED.*, so far as I have found.

In spite of its extreme simplicity I propose *scho-les* 'shoeless.' The Green Knight has come to King Arthur's court in the simplest array. He bears no armor of the ordinary sort, either defensive or offensive. His head is bare except for his flowing locks. He wears a *strayt cote*, a *mantile abof*, green *hose*, and the spurs needed in managing his horse. From head to foot the intruder on the Christmas festivities differs from the usual knightly visitor. Compare with this the elaborate arming of Sir Gawain before he sets out on his quest, lines 566 to 589, and the special mention of *þe sabotounz*, or steel shoes so important in the protective armor of the medieval knight. A quotation from *Piers Plowman* (B. XVIII,

¹ With *z* for Me. *ȝ* when equivalent to voiced *s*, as always in this article.

10-14) presents something of a parallel, and the last lines are especially to be noted:

One semblable to the Samaritan and somedel to Piers the Plowman,
 Barfote on an asse bakke botelees cam prykye;
 Wythoute spores other spere spakliche he loked,
 As is the kynde of a knyght that cometh to be dubbed,
 To geten hem gylte spores or galoches ycouped.

I use the text of Skeat's edition, with semicolon instead of comma at the end of the second line.

The word *shoeless* is not cited in *NED.* before Drayton's *Agincourt* 59 (1627), but that seems to me no bar to the interpretation. Our poet was quite capable of making such a simple compound—parallel to *botelees*, 'bootless,' of the quotation above from the usage of the same century—especially when needing an *sch*-word for the alliteration.

The second passage about which there has been misunderstanding requires quoting more than a single line (864-70):

Sone as he on hent and happed þerinne,
 Ðat sete on hym semly, wyth saylande skyrtez,
 Ðe ver, by his visage, verayly hit semed
 Wel nez to uche habel alle on hwes;
 Lowande and lufly alle his lymmez under,
 Ðat a comloker knyght never Kryst made
 hem þoȝt;

Wheþen in worlde he were,
 Hit semed as he myȝt²
 Be prynce withouten pere,
 In felde þer felle men fyȝt.²

Here the crux is in the word *ver* (866), which Morris glossed 'man, knight,' comparing ON. *ver*, although he should have recognized in that word a phonetic *wer* incapable of alliterating properly with *visage* and *verayly*. The *NED.* sets up a word *ver* for this place only, with the enlightening information 'meaning obscure.' The translators have followed Morris in using one word or another suggested by his gloss. For example the Webster-Neilson translation (*Chief British Poets*, p. 29) combines lines 866-8 as

²The rime with *þoȝt* indicates that these words should be *moȝt*, *foȝt*. For the former see the frequent use of the form in all the *Alliterative Poems*, and for the latter *foȝten* in *Wars of Alex.*, *Ant. of Arth.*, and other places. *Foȝt* is then past subjunctive 'should fight.'

'hue,' s (z) having been carelessly added by the scribe as in several cases in the poems; for *Gawain* cf. *slezez* (893), *wedez* (987), *crowez* (1412), *frekez* (1588), *hepez* (1590). Still a third possibility is that the plural is the poet's, a change from the singular resulting from the two-fold reference in the comparison. At least such a change from singular to plural, to give more general relation, is not uncommon in the poems, as in *Pl.* 450-51, 686-8; *Cl.* 49-50, 167-8, 303-5, 379; *Gaw.* 54. Whatever view of *hwes* is taken can hardly militate, it is believed, against the explanation of the passage here proposed.

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FORERUNNERS OF GOLDSMITH'S *THE CITIZEN OF THE WORLD*

It is usually assumed that Horace Walpole's *Letter from Xo Ho, a Chinese Philosopher at London, To his Friend Lien Chi, at Peking* (1757)¹ furnished Goldsmith with the plan for his *Chinese Letters*, which appeared semi-weekly in Newberry's *Public Ledger*, during 1760-61. This work, however, is so brief, extending over only five folio pages, and so restricted in subject matter, treating only political affairs, that it could have suggested little to Goldsmith except a title for his essays and the use to which he might put a Chinese character. But the foreign observer type of letter had been used in France and in England before Walpole's political satire, and in extended works to which Goldsmith's essays bear closer resemblances. Although Goldsmith was the first to make a practice of casting the familiar essay in the form of a letter written by a stranger in a foreign country to his friends at home, he had a public interested in oriental tales and not wholly unfamiliar with the discussion of social as well as political subjects in letters purporting to have been written by foreign observers.

One of the earliest of these is an eight volume collection entitled *Letters Writ by a Turkish Spy who lived five and forty years, undiscovered at Paris: Giving an Impartial Account to the Divan at Constantinople, of the most Remarkable Transactions of Europe;*

¹ *The Works of Horace Walpole*, 5 vols., London, 1798, I, 205.